On my mother’s fridge there were a lot of things. Things like photos of us, recipes that either turned out good or bad but still wanted to keep saying even if the food was bad the bond we had was just as good, and doctors’ appointment cards. When the fridge got too cluttered that’s when she’d put it in a box. A box labeled when the pile began and ended. She had so many boxes that it took us a whole day to sort through. It was nice reliving those memories when we sorted through them all when she passed.

But there was always one thing that always stayed on the fridge. It wasn’t a picture of her family, The best recipe she found, or a drawing that won an award. It was a postcard of an unknown desert. We always asked her why it was up there. She always gave us a different reason. Like how that’s where she saw aliens or where she and dad met or where she hid the bodies of kids who misbehaved and didn’t clean their plates. That gave my younger brother a few nightmares. I tried asking dad about it when I went to visit him at the local prison, but he’d always rolled his eyes and told me to stop asking. But I remember him muttering something after one of the visitations “I can’t believe she kept that stupid thing.” I told mom he said that, and we weren’t allowed to see him after we moved out.

But there had to be something. The picture had all sorts of wear and tear and yet it was still stuck on top upper left side of the fridge with a ladybug magnet that never lost its stick. I still remember memorizing the photo instead of doing my social studies homework. How the sand looked completely uniform, How the sunset was mainly orange but had pink and blue hues, How the sun was never fully in the picture and behind one of the hills of sand. My mom yelled at me and told me to get back to my homework when she came into the kitchen. Later that night though, when I went downstairs for some water and saw my mom staring at the picture the same way I was. I slipped back to my room grabbing a cup of water from the bathroom, not wanting to disturb my mother.

When my mother was diagnosed with dementia. We all came together and did our best to help around the house. It gave us time to reconnect with her and each other even when her memory was going. Her memory slowly slipped further and further away to the point she didn’t recognize us after a while. That’s when mom was at her worst. When she was agitated and screamed at us. It threw my older sister into emotional hysterics. It was bad for all of us. We considered putting her in hospice, but my sister didn’t want her to be in hospice since she already had a home.

One day though she got better. She looked like she did before she was diagnosed albeit with a lot of her memories gone. But at the very least she remembered us. My sister and I were so happy. But my brother cried. He cried like there was no tomorrow. Like he knew something was going to happen. Like a shoe was going to drop. That night before we went to sleep, my mother asked me to stay. They both left the room, my sister comforting my weeping brother.

She gave me a smile and told me softly “When I go, I want you to look at the back of it. But only after I go,” She held up her pinky like she did oh so many times before “Okay?” I put my pinky in hers and said, “Of course mom.” I already knew what *it* was. The postcard that never moved from its spot. That’s when she ordered me to go to bed. I laughed and closed the door. Not knowing that’s when I would see her alive.

I should’ve said this before, but my brother is doctor. He told us the next day when the ambulance came that what she had was a phenomenon called terminal lucidity or a rally. It’s where a patient gets better for a brief amount of time. He knew what was going to happen next. He apologized profusely that he didn’t tell us, but we forgave him immediately. Not wanting to lose any more family.

I didn’t look at the postcard until after the funeral. It was a large gathering, but it felt more like a celebration if anything. A celebration of everything that my mother was. A larger-than-life woman who was a friend to all and enemy to none. After the funeral my siblings and I stared at the postcard on the fridge. The fridge didn’t have anything but the postcard and the care instructions for mom. Nothing like the fridge before the memory loss. It didn’t matter at that moment. All that mattered was the postcard.

I took the postcard off of the fridge as carefully as possible. We felt like we were committing a crime. But the fact we were about to know what was so special about this card kept us motivated. We flipped the card around to see the words “A place I never wish to be. Because I have all I need to be me.” We all smiled. We were expecting more with our mother, but this was enough for us too.